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SUBJECT: UKRAINE/BELARUS/RUSSIA: GOU VIEWS ON RUSSIA
DEFENSE RELATIONSHIP, BELARUS

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i., for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

11. (C) Summary: During EUR DAS David Kramer's March 13 meetings in Kiev, Deputy Defense Minister Polyakov said that while security issues in the Ukraine-Russia relationship were secondary to political and military aspects, his Ministry (MoD) tried to play a "good cop" role by reinforcing a productive defense relationship with its northeastern neighbor. Russia, however, was having difficulty adjusting to a more independent Ukraine, such as in negotiations on arrangements for the Russian Black Sea Fleet (BSF) presence in Crimea. The Russian military was hesitating over a Ukrainian offer of joint training at Ukraine's Sevastopol Naval Institute and, for the first time, had canceled an annual bilateral naval exercise. Ironically, at the same time Russia was working to keep Ukraine out of NATO, Russia was reinforcing its own relationship with the alliance, Polyakov observed. On Belarus, MFA 2nd Territorial Department Director Anatoliy Ponomarenko said the GOU would assess the conduct of the Belarusian presidential election to determine whether to proceed with planning of a meeting between the two countries' presidents intended to mark the 20th anniversary of the April 1986 Chornobyl accident. If Ukraine did agree to a summit, it would extract a promise, inter alia, that the Belarusian government would not suppress the political opposition. Kramer urged that Ukraine not hold the meeting if violence were used in the election and also asked Ponomarenko and Polyakov to pass a warning to Minsk not to use violence. MFA was considering hosting a conference on democracy in Belarus. End summary.

The Northeastern Neighbor

12. (C) Deputy DefMin Polyakov told Kramer March 13 that military issues in the Ukrainian-Russian relationship were secondary to political and economic aspects; the Defense Ministry had no problems with the Russian military and was able to play the "good cop" role in fostering good relations. Polyakov commented that Russia was facing the classic dilemma of adjusting from its former status as an empire and a superpower and seeking to find its place and the way forward. Ukraine and Russia were like divorced spouses still sharing a communal apartment, Polyakov joked. In the Kravchuk era (1991-94), Ukraine's formal policy toward Russia was tough and rigid, but unofficially it was weak, particularly on issues like the Black Sea Fleet (BSF). In the Kuchma era (1995-2004), both official and unofficial approaches to Russia were marked by weakness. Under Yushchenko, Ukraine was attempting to assert a strong position, defending Ukrainian interests.

13. (C) Polyakov stressed that Ukrainian officials knew that it was in Ukraine's interest to have cooperation with Russia; it was equally important that the U.S. and NATO have fruitful relations with Russia, which could help break down

stereotypes within Russia and Ukraine. Ukraine had suggested that the Russian BSF consider training opportunities at Ukraine's Sevastopol Naval Institute, but "we see hesitation in the eyes of our partners, an unwillingness to engage on the details." Russia had cancelled the annual bilateral naval exercise for 2006 for the first time since the 1997 BSF treaty had been signed. At the same time it was reducing activities with Ukraine, Russia was trying to accelerate cooperation with NATO member countries. Russia's presence at NATO dwarfed that of Ukraine 30 officers to 8, and its ability to contribute a cruiser and three support ships to Operation Active Endeavor outstripped Ukraine's modest aspiration to establish an information point and offer a frigate once it was seaworthy.

14. (C) DAS Kramer stressed that the USG wished to see good relations between Ukraine and Russia, since no one benefited from tensions. Washington did not make comparisons between the two countries' ability to contribute to operations, he stressed; the U.S. was grateful for Ukraine's many contributions to coalition operations, particularly in Iraq.

Black Sea Fleet

15. (C) Regarding January tensions over the BSF and lighthouses, Polyakov suggested Russia hoped that the March 26 elections would change Ukrainian policy dynamics, if not in Ukraine overall, then at least in Crimea. Polyakov praised the MFA's work in pushing for clarification on a number of BSF issues, because in the previous environment of a lack of clarity that had existed since the 1997 treaty was signed, Russia had achieved much at Ukraine's expense. The first Ukrainian-Russian BSF meeting in February, chaired by DFMs Ohryzko on the Ukrainian side and Karazin on the

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Russian, had revealed Russia's psychological difficulty in accepting clear and logical GOU positions, without invented facts, in support of a request to Russia to fulfill the terms of the 1997 agreement. One of the underlying Ukrainian points had been: since you (Moscow) raised the issue of market-based pricing approaches replacing brotherly terms in gas contracts, there is no reason why the same rationale and terms should not now apply to BSF basing terms as well.

16. (C) Polyakov stressed that clarifying the terms of the BSF presence in Ukraine was important to Ukraine's aspiration to join NATO. As the Ukrainian delegation had told the Russians: if you pledge to respect our laws, please respect them; if you pledge to transfer control of certain objects, please transfer control; if you pledge to coordinate BSF movements, please coordinate.

Belarus: Deteriorating Bilateral Relations

17. (C) MFA department director Ponomarenko said MFA had just released a statement protesting the previous day's (March 12) arrest in Minsk of eight Ukrainians and detention of two Fifth Channel journalists. The Belarusian authorities had inadvertently made even clearer the government's oppressive nature, since the television broadcast had continued as the police led away the crying female announcer. MFA had also prepared a diplomatic note critical of the Belarusian police action. Since the new Ukrainian ambassador to Belarus was due to present his credentials March 13, Ponomarenko joked that the ambassador could deliver the note directly to Lukashenka. Turning more serious, he said delivery of diplomatic note would occur after the credentials ceremony and an appointment with an appropriately high-ranking Belarusian MFA official. FM Tarasyuk was attempting to speak by telephone with his Belarusian counterpart, Sergei Martynov, but the latter had so far been unavailable.

Future Policy

18. (C) Ponomarenko noted the Ukrainian approach to Belarus differed from the USG's in that the GOU did not believe Belarusian isolation was productive. In her meeting with Tarasyuk, the Secretary had expressed dissatisfaction with the Ukrainian position, telling Tarasyuk that Lukashenka needed "to clean up his act." For the future, the Ukrainian MFA was pursuing two options, still continuing to explore the possibility of holding a meeting between the two countries' presidents and also to hold a conference somewhere in Ukraine on support for democracy in Belarus. Ponomarenko said the GOU had not yet taken a final decision on a presidential summit meeting, which, if it took place, would occur in the context of the 20th anniversary of the April 1986 Chornobyl disaster. The GOU decision would factor in the conduct and possible use of violence during the March 19 Belarusian presidential election.

19. (C) Any meeting of the two presidents would take place at the end of April, either in Chornobyl or Slavutych both in Ukraine and near the Ukraine-Belarus border, Ponomarenko continued. The Ukrainian government was considering setting two preconditions to the meeting. First, the Belarusian government would have to commit to not suppressing the Belarusian opposition. Second, the Belarusian government would have to commit in writing that it would sign an agreement to simplify the transfer of people and goods across a narrow sliver of Belarus separating Slavutych (where many workers on the Chornobyl facility and their families live) and Chornobyl Nuclear Power Station. A possible third precondition might be Belarusian agreement to the opening of a Ukrainian information and cultural center in Minsk. The MFA would also arm President Yushchenko with further "political signals" to convey to Lukashenka. MFA officials were consulting closely with the EU as they considered whether to hold the meeting and would also be careful to consult with the USG.

110. (C) Ponomarenko said there was no doubt that the vote tally would show that Lukashenka had won the election. Ukraine, the U.S., the EU, EU member states, and perhaps even Russia, were not happy with Lukashenka, but Russia was having difficulty finding an acceptable and viable replacement to him. In the meantime, Russia continued to prop up Lukashenka by providing cheap natural gas to Belarus. With no oligarchs in Belarus, a significant share of Belarusian enterprises' profits was being channeled into the Presidential Administration fund, which Lukashenka was using to boost the average Belarusian salary to USD 300 per month, higher than the Ukrainian average.

111. (C) DAS Kramer said he understood the difficulties that

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countries that border Belarus have in dealing with the country. Nevertheless, on March 9, he had provided testimony on Belarus to the U.S. Helsinki Commission, and A/S Fried had spoken recently at CSIS on the markedly contrasting Ukrainian and Belarusian elections. Both he and Fried had spoken forcefully and bluntly about Belarusian corruption and electoral abuses. The U.S. was pleased with its close cooperation with the EU on Belarus and appreciated the Ukrainian MFA's statements supportive of EU positions. The recent detentions of Ukrainian citizens demonstrated the need to speak out and deplore the situation in Belarus. Kramer urged caution on holding meetings at the highest level, saying that a meeting of presidents should not take place if violence were used during the election and would appreciate a warning to Minsk from Ukraine against the use of violence. Kramer stressed the importance of not inadvertently sending any mixed messages to Minsk.

The Defense Ministry Approach

112. (C) On Belarus, Deputy DefMin Polyakov noted that the

Ukrainian military again played the "good cop," cultivating relationships with the Belarusian military for the long-term that mirrored NATO engagement of Belarus under Partnership for Peace. Defense Minister Hrytsenko had visited twice in 2005, once on a counterpart visit and once accompanying PM Yekhanurov. The Belarus Defense Minister had visited Ukraine in late 2005 to mark Belarus' purchase of Ukrainian trainer jets. Ukraine was also paying for Belarus personnel to participate in the Rapid Trident exercise, Polyakov added. Kramer noted U.S. concerns were not with the Belarusian military but with the security services; we were worried about the potential for use of force/violence around the March 19 presidential elections. Kramer said he had passed a clear message while visiting Minsk in February that, were violence to occur, there would be consequences. Kramer asked if Polyakov and the Ukrainian military could also pass this message through their channels. The more the Belarusians heard this coordinated message from neighbors, the better.

¶13. (U) DAS Kramer did not have a chance to clear this message.

¶14. (U) Visit Embassy Kiev's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
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